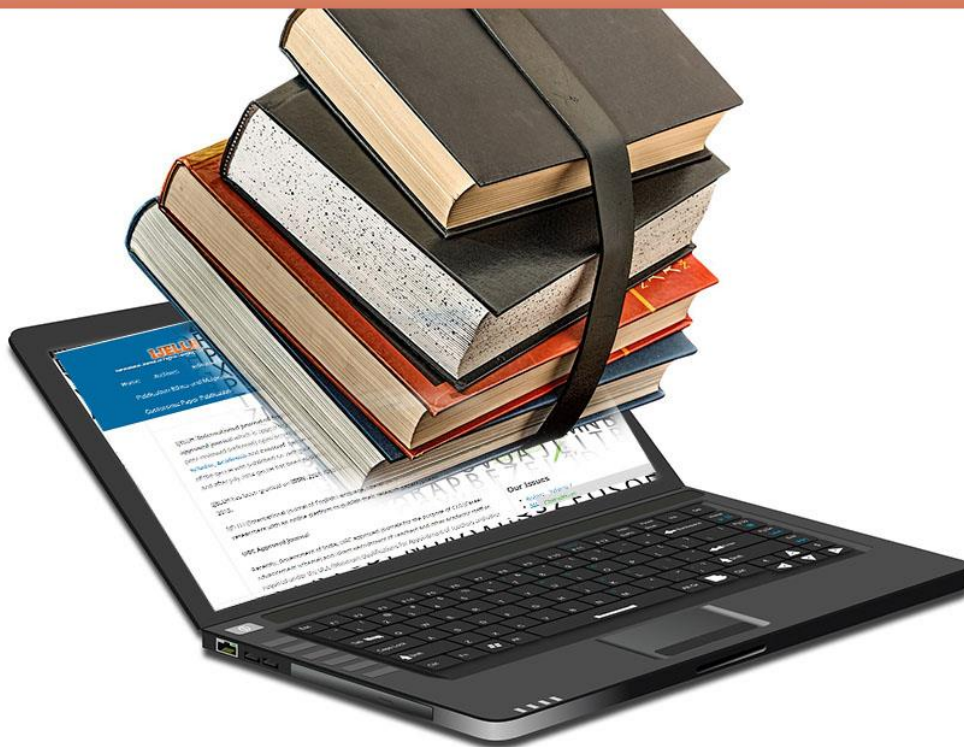


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Using an Authentic Text for EFL / ESL Reading Comprehension with a Given Class of Learners

Abstract

When teaching languages, authentic texts may be used. Authentic texts are not altered before they are used as a teaching tool, as it is believed that they will help learners to communicate more effectively, both in their writing and speech. Authentic texts, then, were not written or designed with the classroom in mind and have not been created specifically for learning. This paper analyses the way in which authentic texts can be used when learning English as a second language by focusing on reading comprehension tasks which are given to learners in a classroom setting, by discussing the classroom setting, the text itself and also the lesson phases used. Existing literature on the topic suggests that using authentic texts can help to expose students to the way in which the language that they are learning is used in the real world, with instructors enabling the language learning process by providing students with information about both the context and content of the text that they are analysing. This helps learners to interpret and understand the information that they are given. Many teachers choose to use authentic texts as these are original documents in the target language, which can provide

examples of extended language use, as well as holding the interest of the students. Using authentic texts can help to improve the confidence of the students as it can boost their knowledge surrounding the community of the language that they are learning and ensures that they understand how to correctly use the language. This paper will summarise that when teaching English as a second language, educators should use authentic texts and engaging teaching methods to improve ESL reading comprehension scores.

Keywords: Authentic, Text, ESL, EFL, Reading, Comprehension.

Introduction

An authentic text can be defined as a learning material that is not altered before being used for teaching a specific language to speakers of other languages to help them to communicate better both in writing and orally. The material retains its originality in the sense that its original form is retains all grammatical components such as sentence structure and vocabulary. An authentic text is thus one that was not originally meant for the use in the classroom, though it may have been used for any other purpose except learning. The use of authentic materials in class enables students' exposure to real-life examples of the use of language in real world situations. Instructors can use these elements to best effect by providing guidelines on the use of such materials to the learners. This method entails the examination of both context and content by the learner so that they learn to interpret and comprehend whatever they read, listen to, and view (Al Musallam, 2009). Authentic materials include websites and textbooks for non-language topics. This paper seeks to discuss the use of such authentic texts in developing reading comprehension in a given class of learners. It will thus introduce and examine the class of learners and the authentic text to be used, and give details of the lesson phases.

Introducing the class

The class of learners studied was composed of B2 upper-intermediate English learners. Students at this level have some efficiency in the use of English language as well as fluency in some, but not all, contexts. These learners are regarded as being more advanced in knowledge than many other levels such as the intermediate and pre-intermediate levels (Hadfield et al., 2000). The class is comprised of thirty students who are very focused on learning English as a second language. All of the students in this class are studying English as a second language as part of their foundation year stage in a Saudi university. Thus, studying English is likely to enable them to excel in their chosen professions such as medicine, piloting, nursing, and engineering. This class of learners is thus likely to have the ability to learn English as a second language well due to their advanced learning capabilities and quick mastery of concepts.

In this class, the students' attitudes towards studying English language vary; the students can be divided into three groups based on their attitudes towards studying English. Some of the students are very interested in learning English; they want to both achieve good grades and be able to communicate effectively inside school and in the outside world. The selected authentic text method works well for them, as it provides actual examples of English communication in native communities. This group of students, defined as those with high interest, includes many effective users of the English language at their current level. Another group of students are defined as having neutral interest in the subject. They are slightly interested, but are not enthusiastic about learning English without some pushing by the instructor. The students lack much interest in learning English due to their lack of a solid English foundation. In addition, lack confidence in using English due to a fear of making mistakes. However, providing exciting materials for this group of students, such as the authentic texts, increases their interest in reading (Goldenberg, 2008). The final group of students lacks interest in learning the English language. Such learners are often the poor performers, as they put little effort into reading

English. The instructor should thus choose the type of authentic materials that might increase their interest in reading.

This class of learners is currently preparing to undertake the TOEFL exam; this is required to pass the foundation year at this university. The exam tests the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Language components, including vocabulary items, pronunciation, and grammatical structures are also tested. However, in the particular lesson under investigation, only reading comprehension skill in English language were trained, though as the learners are non-native speakers of English language, their listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills are also tested. Due to the proximity of the test, the focus of the students is enhanced as they all want to get good grades. Using authentic text in this atmosphere will thus enhance their English language skills by promoting learning (Gibbons, 2002).

Introducing the authentic text

An article titled *The best medicine* has been selected as the authentic text for the *Reading Comprehension lesson* in this class (Appendix 1). The article was not altered in any way, thus retaining its authenticity. The article was chosen to be attractive to the readers, particularly with regard to their goal to communicate well in English. As the Functional and Genre approach explains, language is a tool used to give expression to real world experiences (Lingzhu and Yuanyuan, 2010) This article captures real-life experiences in terms of developing a healthy lifestyle, capturing students' attention to a large extent. The article has a level of simplicity in terms of the English language used, making it appropriate for learners of English as a second language. The structuring of sentences, use of vocabulary, tenses, and pronunciation of words used in the article are relatively easy to understand. Additionally, the text selected presents an opportunity for students to examine real-life use of English communication, as the text is not written mainly for language students. This helps them gain understanding and experience of the use of English language in the outside world, giving them confidence.

This website article can thus be used as authentic material to enable the students to achieve efficiency in the use and understanding of the English language. The segment contains information on healthy living as reflected in terms of proper diet and regular physical exercise. It was selected to aid the learners in acquiring useful information in a short period of time. This type of material is essential in terms of updating the students with everyday English communication used in the real world. This authentic text type enables them to gain confidence and knowledge of the mode of discussion used in the outside world (Ball et al, 2009), allowing students to communicate in English with less hesitation.

Authentic material also enables learners to get involved in world issues (Myles & Mitchell, 2014); in this case, the piece contains information regarding current thinking on effects of exercise on the health status of individuals. Reading the article, with its diverse grammatical components, should enable the learners to reach a higher level of English proficiency more easily. The vocabulary and grammatical components used in the text include the structuring of sentences and paragraphs, punctuation, use of vocabulary, and proper use of verbs. The instructor can then analyse the English language concepts used in the authentic text to influence the boost to students' linguistic levels. This yields an improvement in the ability of the learners to discover new information from websites in English, which may eventually increase students' knowledge.

Where articles are used by the instructor to enhance reading comprehension in English, the teacher must ensure that the content of the article is well understood and that use of the authentic material improves students' reading comprehension. In this case, the text contains written material, pictures, and a video. These three items complement each other in terms of conveying the message about the importance of exercise and its impacts on the health of individuals.

The teacher must ensure that each student has a copy of the text to view the content, allowing them to gain a clear understanding of the use of words and the content in the article. The instructor then leads the class in reading the content of the article aloud, before explaining some of the details of the material as required to promote a clearer understanding of the text. The teacher will then lead the students in viewing the pictures that illustrate the benefits of exercise for the body and examples of actual activity. The teacher can then take the students through the video to enhance their understanding of the recommended physical activities; here, the video illustrates workouts that enable an individual to remain fit.

The use of this particular article in teaching reading comprehension is that the content of the material is demonstrated in pictures and video as well as text. Hence, the document enables the teacher to meet the needs of all the students, despite varying competence levels. It explains details comprehensibly in such a way that any student can gain some understanding of what is being communicated. Added to the explanations given by the teacher and the clarifications made in cases where the students fail to understand, this should generally promote comprehension.

Importance of the authentic text

According to Vanpattern and Williams (2014), Richards and Rodgers (2014), and Larsen Freeman and Long (2014), the importance of authentic text lies between its ability to promote learning by enhancing students' comprehension. Authentic texts have the ability to motivate students in a significant way, whereas students may otherwise fail to connect the gaps between classroom use of language and real-world use. The use of authentic texts offers students a chance to gain a clear understanding of the use of language in the real world. This knowledge enables them to participate in the language-speaking community actively, and thus authentic materials provide learners with essential tools for autonomous learning and living (August & Shanahan, 2017; McKay, 2016). The engaging aspect of such authentic texts also makes them

more interesting than simulations such as textbooks. The instructor is thus given an opportunity to select exciting materials which meet the requirements of students and to meet the specific needs of students, evaluating and identifying those needs and focusing more on the areas where they are currently weak. Where needed, the instructor can also individualise teaching to ensure that students capture the content effectively.

The most motivating aspect of the use of authentic text is the opportunity to read language designed for native speakers (Echevarria, 2016). Having been motivated in this way, students become more confident as they can learn extensively outside the classroom. Students can also explore essential topics by means of the use of authentic texts, and the use of these materials serves as a reminder to students of the existence of the population that incorporates this language knowledge in most of their operations. These materials are thus essential in providing information about the culture of the target language as well as that culture's perspectives on particular events or issues. Consequently, authentic materials provide language learners with the input necessary for deeper knowledge acquisition.

Examples of activities to be covered and their rationale

Content to be tackled: The best medicine

1. Introduction to the topic to enable the students to obtain a general view of the issue and thus be prepared psychologically for the content (Braine, 2013).
2. Finding out what the students already know about diet and exercise. Evaluating existing knowledge on diet and exercise is vital, as the instructor will then know where to begin in terms of approaching the topic. If the learners have little information regarding the subject, the teacher will be wise to start teaching from basics (August & Shanahan, 2017).

3. Confirming the pronunciation of universal health vocabulary items by writing words and phrases on the board and making the students copy the words. Knowledge of the pronunciation of the vocabulary used in the authentic material will enable students to improve their English language skills (Garcia, 2008), which is the primary aim of the use of authentic text.
4. Provision of written copies of the authentic material in the English language (Braine, 2013). This ensures that the students are able to clearly see the content in English. Visual concepts such as punctuation and sentence structure, as well as the pictures within the material, enhance understanding of the content.
5. Subdivision of students into groups to discuss what they understand about diet and exercise from what is written in the text (Akbari & Razavi, 2016). This particular interaction and discussion of the topic enables individual students to air their views and to gain a clear understanding about what proper diet and regular exercise involve in this context. This can be attributed to the fact that where the learners interact with each other freely, they will also speak their minds freely.
6. According to Braine (2013), the students should report back on what they have learnt concerning the topic. This enables all students to encounter the different notions and understandings of diet and exercise developed by the various groups of students.
7. Pointing out and correcting any mistakes aired by the group members' representatives. Correcting errors made by particular groups will enhance their knowledge of English, preventing them from repeating those errors in the future (Ball et al., 2009).
8. Determining the extent of the students' understanding by asking questions regarding the topic (Akbari & Razavi, 2016). Acquiring feedback from students enables the instructor to assess their levels of knowledge and comprehension. By doing this, the teacher will know which areas of English language to emphasise later.

Teaching Stages

While teaching the authentic material, the teacher should establish a clear purpose for reading the text (Hinkel, 2011; Braine, 2013; Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009). This should be done by considering the impacts the text can have in enhancing learning of English. Understanding of the text should be subsidiary to the purpose of developing better comprehension of the concepts. The instructor should ensure that the text contains grammatical structures and words that are familiar to the learners at their current level of learning (Horwitz, 2008). If the vocabulary used is not familiar, the instructors can consider introducing words and phrases in pre-reading activities that encompass language awareness, including finding autonyms and synonyms.

Some theories on teaching how to read comprehensively argue that people read and understand authentic texts successfully by using the knowledge components that are key to textual comprehension. The teacher can thus use knowledge sources including rhetorical, linguistic, intentional, and causal strategies, as well as personalities, roles, and objectives. Theorists further argue that lack of any of these knowledge sources can lead to a lack of full understanding of the texts used (Brinton and Celce-Murcia, 2014; Myles & Mitchell, 2014; Rutherford, 2014; Lucas et al., 2008). In teaching authentic material, the instructor must pay attention to the knowledge components of individual students. This consideration drives the selection of particular authentic material by the teacher, as all the students must be able to understand it. Careful selection is thus based on the level of the students' knowledge and skills. Consequently, the appropriate application of theories of teaching to read comprehensively is employed by English language teachers to teach authentic materials.

The authentic material is chosen by paying consideration to the interests of the students, including their backgrounds, culture, and age range. The article selected in this instance, covering exercise and proper diet as "the best medicine" for health is suitable for students above

the age of eleven years, as the workouts illustrated cover this age range. Research shows that pre-reading activities are essential in facilitating comprehension, as they provide necessary background information about a topic (Al Azvi & Al Rashdi, 2014). The instructor must thus provide background knowledge about health in this case, including giving instances of occurrences of poor health attributable to poor diet and irregular or absent physical exercise. Importantly, such pre-reading activities will enhance learners' understanding, lightening their cognitive burden while reading as background information will already have been incorporated into their thinking.

The teaching stage of the lesson entails careful prior planning, with explicit outlining of the objectives with the aim of meeting the students' requirements (Lingzhu & Yuanyuan, 2010; Oguz & Bahar, 2008). The teacher should thus coordinate a number of activities for the successful delivery of knowledge to ensure the acquisition of meaning per semantic theory. According to previous studies (Bahrani & Sim, 2012; Lombardi, 2008; McGrath, 2013; Temple et al., 2018; Stigler & Hiebert, 2009), meaning acquisition is the most crucial task in teaching a second language. Many second language learners fail to acquire meaning due to a poor understanding of second language content. Thus, the teacher should ensure that this goal is attained, and that by the end of the lesson, all the students can point out how physical exercise serves as the best medicine. Consequently, the teacher should aim to support the derivation of the four types of meaning: lexical, grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic.

Human information processing theory is used to explain the comprehensive teaching of reading by describing the way individuals think about and digest the information they acquire before finalising its interpretation in their minds (Meyers & Nulty, 2009; Kramsch, 2014; Valtonen et al, 2015). This approach focuses on the components of strategic processing of knowledge and the competence or metacognition of human consciousness. The theory explains the complicated way in which the human mind processes external data entering into the brain. The

ability to process information conclusively is thus determined by the cognitive ability of the individual.

Universal grammar theories are applicable in the teaching stage of a lesson, whereby the aspect of shared language principles and the fundamental properties that apply between languages can be highlighted. The parameters and beliefs inherent in both the native language of the students and the second language (in this case, English) can be emphasised. The characteristics shared between different languages enable students to more quickly understand the second language, as they can relate it to the features of the first language (Linton, 2012; Richards, 2013; Huang et al, 2011). Hence, an understanding of universal grammar principles will enhance the understanding of English language in this lesson. Such theory simplifies the work of the teacher, as universal grammar principles will be applied by the students to understand the topic more clearly.

There are two possible pre-reading approaches available, teacher-directed and interactive. The first approach entails the instructor explaining the ideas and vocabulary within the authentic material, including crucial information such as fundamental concepts (Kelsen, 2009; Asgari & Mustapha, 2011; Oguz & Bahar, 2008). The teacher in this particular lesson should use an interactive approach, however, leading a discussion that enables the teacher to find out what the learners already know about the best medicine. The focus of the debate should be on the information necessary to understand the concepts within the article.

Pre-reading activities

The teacher will first introduce the topic, to set the atmosphere for teaching the subject as prepared. The instructor sets the scene for the lesson by means of activities such as asking students questions regarding the best medicine from past lessons and other topics with some association with the intended topic of discussion. The teacher should then conduct

brainstorming, writing ideas on the board, playing educative games, and reviewing appropriate materials from past lessons. Doing these activities will capture the attention of the learners, moving them towards the right direction. It will also establish a basis for the students thinking and reasoning about proper diet and exercise, thus preparing the minds of the students for the lesson ahead.

The presentation of new authentic material can be conducted by the teacher in several different ways to ensure that all the students understand the concept being presented (Akbari & Razari, 2016; Han, 2015; Garcia, 2008; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008). The factual material in this case is displayed in the form of a written text, and the content examined section by section to explain in detail the recommended components of proper diet and exercise and the reason they are referred to as the best medicine. Presentation of information incrementally will enhance understanding as the students are able to digest the information more efficiently. The teacher will be able to explain clearly the grammar used in the authentic material, and learners will be provided with more examples of the grammar components used to develop clearer understanding. Citing additional examples will enable the students to gain a clear understanding of the content of the website as well as the proper use of grammar in the text.

During-reading activities

According to schema theory, reading comprehension is an interactive process between the reader's prior knowledge and the text (Moussu & Llurda, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2008). There are four types of reading skills: skimming (reading quickly to obtain the major points), scanning (reading quickly to get specific information), extensive reading (careful reading of a long text with the aim of gaining a general understanding), and intensive reading (interpretation of a short text with the objective of extracting all details).

The teacher of this particular lesson will employ intensive reading when teaching this material. The objective is to acquire details from the text so that the students can understand the different grammatical concepts and vocabulary items used in the material to enhance their knowledge and skills in English. The teacher must thus use tips to encourage the students to read actively. Applicable tips include reacting, summarizing, arguing, questioning, and evaluating the text to support the students in learning the English language.

For a successful teaching stage, learners must be involved actively to boost their concentration and enhance their understanding (Kirkgoz, 2008; Khan, 2011). Hence, the teacher must initiate several activities to ensure that learners understand the contribution of both diet and exercise to health. The students should be involved in using the authentic material in context, so the teacher should develop activities whereby the students are required to use their new English vocabularies in small groups. After that, they will be asked to use the original ideas they have learned to construct a sentence and present it to the class individually. They will also be required to use the ideas in the material regarding healthy lifestyle in relation to diet and exercise in further activities.

The teacher should initiate activities such as filling in the blanks and problem-solving activities (Appendix 3). Examples of questions used to enhance the learners' understanding include 1) doctors say that ----- and ----- help us to keep healthy, and 2) What is most likely to help a person experiencing fast aging and poor vision? The practice will thus include testing the oral and written skills of the students. Upon completion of these activities, the teacher will read out the questions and give answers for the sake of any students who got them wrong. Involving the students ensure that they can achieve a solid grasp of the content of the authentic material used. The use of the activities thus helps keep the students excited and intrigued and maintains focus.

After-reading activities

The production part of teaching the lesson involves allowing the students to use their newly learned content from the authentic material openly and freely (Heugh & Prinsloo, 2013). The teacher will give the students opportunities in groups to use the content of the article freely both in writing sentences and speaking. In these groups, they will also practice a variety of physical exercises to demonstrate the content of the material. Thus, the learners should be able to express their new learning and understanding of the new concepts presented in the article.

The teacher will employ several language knowledge areas and component skills, including automatic recognition skills, structural and vocabulary knowledge, formal discourse, fundamental knowledge, background knowledge, evaluation and synthesis skills, and metacognitive skills and knowledge (San Chee & Mehrotha, 2012). The instructor must ensure that the students use all of their knowledge areas and component skills when reading the authentic material. Use of all these components gives the learners a natural way to deeply understand the content, including the repercussions of poor diet and irregular exercise and the health advantages of observing a proper diet and exercise regime. A detailed description of the lesson plan for this is presented in Appendix 2.

Communicative activities used during the lesson.

The teacher will employ communicative activities to encourage the use of English language by the learners as they communicate with the others to boost their knowledge and skills (Lingzhu & Yuanyuan, 2010). These communicative activities are mostly based on the communicative language teaching approach CLT (Albahri et al, 2018). The outcome is the ability to communicate with other people effectively, and communicative language teaching will enable the students to create authentic English language as they communicate. This is the audio bilingualism section of the lesson.

Research shows that learning is optimized when students are involved with relevant communicative tasks in a dynamic way (Gunn & Herrick, 2011; Oleson & Hora, 2014). Hence, the teacher should use communicative activities to break down communicative barriers to allow students to talk about themselves and learn about communication culture. These events should be incorporated into the lesson.

The communicative activities incorporated into teaching authentic material include reading the information provided in the text, with the students repeating the phrases after the teacher. This enhances proper pronunciation of words and precise intonation. The students can then construct sentences that capture their newly learned English language concepts, being allowed to build sentences that reflect the content of the material regarding diet and exercise and their application in students' real lives. The students should communicate in groups while discussing the concept of "the best medicine", with each of them free to air their views regardless of the quality of initial sentence formation; the instructor can correct these issues later. Phonics and spelling will also be tested by the instructor by mentioning particular vocabulary points and selecting willing students to pronounce these aloud while others to write them on the board. On this way, the use of communicative activities offers an effective way to boost understanding of the English language.

Conclusion

Authentic texts are commonly used by teachers with the aim of providing original forms and concepts in the target language to their students. The choice of the factual material in teaching is propelled by the fact that such materials are interesting to students and provide examples of extended language use. They also give the students the confidence to use their knowledge in the target communities once they know how it is used correctly. In teaching English as a second language, teachers thus frequently use authentic materials as well as exciting teaching

techniques to boost reading comprehension in English. The success of such plans entails preparation of workable lesson outlines which meet the requirements of all students.

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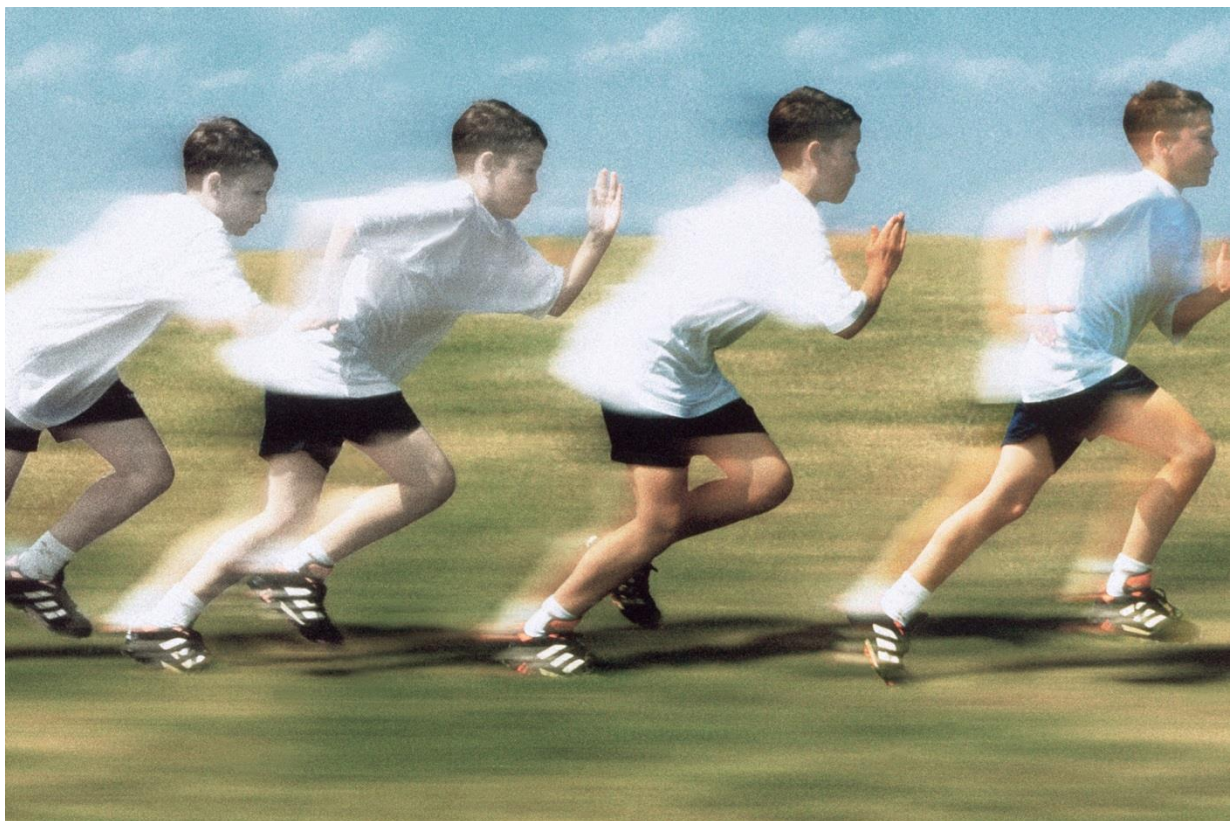
Appendices

Appendix 1: Authentic text

The Best Medicine

April 21, 2017

Mandy Oaklander with reporting by Glenn Greenberg



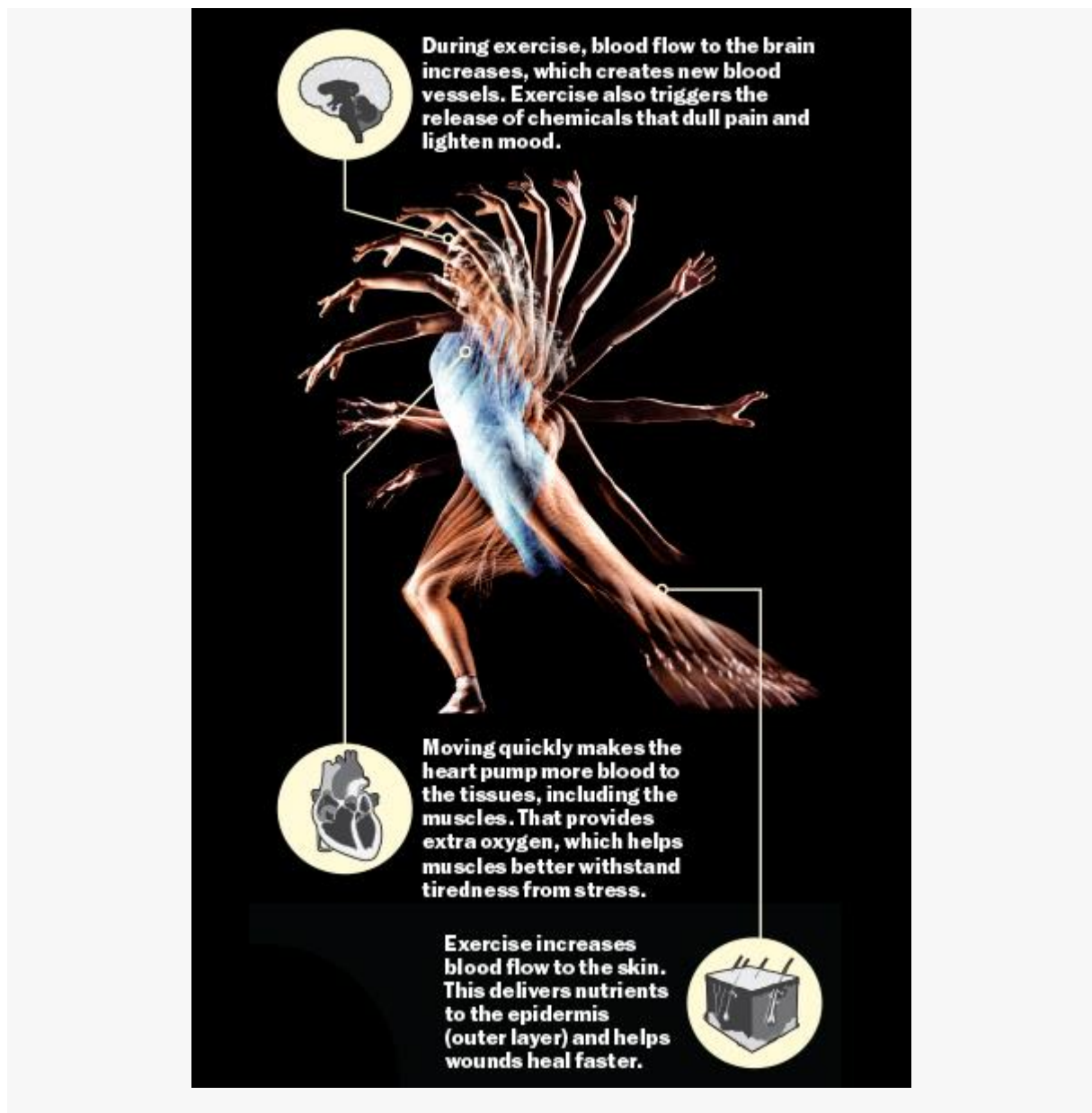
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A new study hopes to scientifically prove the benefits of physical activity.

Doctors have long known that diet and exercise are the best ways to stay healthy. But few people get enough exercise. Only 20% of Americans get the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week. More than 80 million Americans over age 6 are entirely inactive.

Many U.S. schools have cut gym classes. Only 15% of elementary schools require physical education at least three days a week.

People leading a sedentary life pay a price. They are at higher risk for serious health problems. These include heart disease and cancer.



THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

Health experts want people to know about the benefits of exercise. They believe it can lead to slower aging, better mood, stronger vision—the list goes on.

This year, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) is starting a major study. It will record in detail what happens inside a body in motion. Through its research, the NIH hopes to prove scientifically that exercise is good medicine.

Workout Wonders

The project will run for six years. It will involve a group of about 3,000 sedentary people. They will range from 11-year-olds to the elderly. The group will begin an exercise program. Their blood, fat, and muscle will be studied before and after each workout. Scientists will look for clues to how the body changes with physical activity. A group that doesn't exercise will also be tracked. Experts will compare the two groups.

Studies show that many positive changes happen in the body during and after a workout.

"Exercise restores muscles that have become weak," Marcos Bamman says. He is the director of exercise medicine at the University of Alabama and is working on the NIH study. He adds that exercise "can help repair tissues that are failing due to lack of use, disease or injuries, or aging."

One of the best pieces of news is that much of what we already do counts as physical activity.

"Mowing the grass, raking leaves, washing the car—all that is exercise," says Jack Berryman. He is a retired professor of medical history at Washington University School of Medicine, in Seattle. "Physical activity includes all movement, not just throwing a ball through a basket."

Bamman hopes the NIH study will help doctors give each of their patients a detailed workout plan. In the meantime, here is a prescription for good health: Get active!

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Appendix 2: lesson plan

Total Time: 50 minutes	Numbers of students: 30 students	Students' level: B2 upper-intermediate learners	Class: English for Foundation year/ TOEFL preparation/ Reading Comprehension Practice
Time	Stage	Aim	Procedure
5 minutes	Lead-in	To arouse interest and introduce the topic of the best medicine.	-Investigating the knowledge of students on the subject. -Asking questions covered in previous lessons that relate to the issue.
5 minutes	Brainstorming	To activate the knowledge the students know on the topic	-Asking the students to demonstrate the

			types of workouts they know as well as the components of a balanced meal.
10 minutes	Prediction	To teach the new vocabularies To arouse further interest	-Writing the new words in the authentic material and their meanings.
5 minutes	Reading the text	To integrate their skills: reading and speaking	-leading the students to read loudly through the text.
10 minutes	Presentation	To explain what the best medicine entails clarifying the pronunciation of vocabularies. To evaluate their comprehension skills	-Explaining the meaning of the text. -Asking them questions to check on their understanding and comprehension.
10 minutes	Practice	To understand the benefits of the article, <i>the best medicine</i> .	-Learners demonstrate the different physical exercise. -Students give examples of health

			complications attributed to lack of activity.
5 minutes	Feedback	To acquire feedback on the task completed.	-Posing general questions regarding the topic of the best medicine. Writing several vocabulary items encountered wrongly to test whether the students will realize the errors.

Appendix 3: Questions asked by the teacher during the lesson

1. When an individual has a sedentary lifestyle, they are likely to develop----- and heart disease.
2. The benefits of exercise include slower aging, -----, and -----.
3. The best medicine is the combination of ----- and -----.
4. Physical exercise is only suitable for young people. (true or false)
5. Many of the Americans engage in physical exercise. (true or false)
6. Failure to do physical exercise will lead to health complications. (true or false)
7. As long as an individual does regular physical exercise they can do away with proper diet. (true or false)
8. The impacts of physical exercise are reflected in all the facets of human life. (true or false)